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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0847 11/24/06

~ Immunity for Bloggers? ~ People Are Talking! ~ Office Is Unfazed!
~ Microsoft Sues Phishers ~ Safer Online Shopping! ~ Regifting Gets Site!
~ Break Off Telemarketers ~ The Web Is Number Two! ~ MS Refiles With EU!
~ Second Life Nearly Dies ~ Microsoft Faces Battle ~ PS3 Is More3 Scarce!

-* Bypassing Attachment Limits! *-
-* Nigerian Scams Cost Brits Millions! *-
-* Judge To Rule On Landmark Internet Porn Law *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

I don't know about you, but I am absolutely stuffed!! Burp! What a great day. It was a typical Thanksgiving around here. I do all of the turkey preparation for us; and I mean all of it. I use an old turkey recipe that my parents told me about over 30 years ago - none of this turkey in the oven for half the day. Mine only takes 3 - 3 1/2 hours to cook, at a high heat. Moist and delicious every time! Also, all of the fixings, although we did not go crazy with side dishes this year. Not enough room on the plate! I only had one (large) helping this year - it's all about the leftovers as far as I'm concerned. But, that second piece of apple pie did me in, and I can't eat another bite.

It's going to be an early night, for a change. Not only does eating turkey have a great sedating effect on me, but I'll be getting up when my wife does and make my first suicidal Black Friday excursion. I could never understand the fascination with going shopping the day after Thanksgiving (aren't you people too exhausted from the feast?!?!) or returning Christmas presents the day after Christmas! I looked through the Black Friday ad circulars and did not see any real bargains out there. Then again, I really don't need anything from these ads, so perhaps didn't see the big savings. However, because of the rush for the new game consoles, I did want to make sure that I got my wife the PSP that she wanted - and it was on sale. My rationale for this trip into the insanity of Black Friday was that because people weren't going to be able to [easily] obtain the new Wii or PS3, they might settle for the PSP. So, off I'll go to try and get one (I was successful, as it turned out!).

So, while I relax and take in all of the holiday spirit, I'll let you do the same...while reading this week's issue, of course. All of us here at A-ONE hope that you had an enjoyable holiday with friends and family.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, here I sit, full to the gills with turkey and all the trimmin's. We had Thanksgiving dinner here with my wife's family. There were fewer of us than I had anticipated, but there were still 11 of us at the table. It was a good day, and everything went just about as planned.

There were, of course, a few tense moments during the cooking phase... like when I checked the turkey to find that it had cooked much faster than I had figured on. Nonetheless, everything was, if not perfect, at least 'good', and everyone was pleased with the outcome.

So now, with Thanksgiving out of the way, comes the mad rush to find Christmas gifts for everyone. I'm not one of those people who participates in the Black Friday shopping ritual, and I must confess I don't understand the attraction. All those people clamoring for deals that aren't all that great, fighting crowds that are still gorped out from the tryptophan overdosing, and trying to get into the spirit of a season that isn't truly here yet... hmmm... I wonder WHY I've never been attracted to it.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet while I try to digest the turkey I had as a snack when my wife wasn't looking.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

'Mike' asks about his Milan project:

"Took time installing the Milan board into it's a new case and drat, needs a power cable adapter to go from ATX to AT power supply connector. Mail order, should be here in a few days. Case is a Thermaltake Matrix P/N VD2400BNS. I thought it was cool.

Purchased a D-Link DFE-530TX NIC and Pioneer DVR-710 IDE drive.

Left the S3 graphics card in for now, saw a web site where a Milan user has an ATI Rage 128 installed, didn't book mark it and can't find it again....I have an ATI All In Wonder 128 at work, not sure if the S3 is better or worse.

Are there specific SCSI cards to be used, or will most ADAPTEC cards work with the SCSI BIOS? Is there a particular order the cards should be installed in?

Haven't seen anything come up searching USB devices, has there been any development in that area? Any active Milan discussion areas to become involved in?

One more question tonight... What is the minimum that must be connected to get the Milan to boot? (keyboard, etc). Found an old 486 PS and tried to fire it up just to see the start up screen, but am not getting video output. EDO is filled up, video card, NIC card and SCSI card are installed, nothing else."

Michael Schwingen tells Mike:

"The bare minimum is a power supply and a speaker - you should at least get some beep code from the board.

To get video output, you need the VGA card and memory - there has to be at least 16MB in bank 0. Old bootblock versions will start up the video card without any memory, but newer ones will just beep (because the 8086 emulator used for the VGA bios on newer video cards simply needs memory)."

Mike tells Michael:

"Thanks for taking the time to reply :)

Swapped a few sticks in and out, and she booted up. There are now 4 sticks of 16 chip 60ns memory installed. Should be 128meg, but the Milan only recognizes and test 112 meg. It does successfully boot to desk top. Maybe one is a 16 meg stick.

Only the S3 video card is installed (PCI 0). No keyboard, mouse, hard disk.

Boot Block V 1.02
Board Rev 1
1/0 8086 122E
1/1 8086 1230
2/0 5333 8901 INT A IRQ 9
S/N 01010031001

Trash can icon is wearing sun glasses and smoking a cigar :)

68060

I removed the 68040 and installed the ET adapter and XC68060RC50A. The Milan would not boot with the adapter and 060 CPU installed, there was no video output. I verified the 3.3V output of the adapter. The CPU warms up.

The only English docs I have for installing a 68060 are by Ingo Schmidt, 2001, and another article by Peter Slegg, 2003. The link Peter provides for contact information concerning the 68060 adapter made by Uwe Schneider is no longer valid. According to Ingo’s article, the Milan flash has the correct update to install a 68060. I did note in Peter’s article that the adapter he purchased from Uwe came with a patch, but he does not elaborate if it is only the V1.2 Boot Block, or another patch that must be installed along with the 68060. Assuming the processor is good, either the old power supply is causing the trouble, there is a difference between how the necessary pins on the 68060 are pulled up, or a patch is needed.

I reinstalled the 68040 and the Milan boots to desktop.
Do you have current contact information for Uwe, or access to the adapter documentation, or necessary patch?"

Greg Goodwin asks Mike:

"Do you perhaps have an accessory called "Trashy" installed? I remember that trash can -- every couple of hours the trash can would giggle and hide under another icon, but since I usually had a window covering the

screen I would just hear a strange giggle that really didn't sound like it was coming from the computer. When I returned to the desktop I often didn't look for the trash can, and when I did I couldn't figure out why the desktop file wasn't saving the trash's location where I placed it. It took months to figure out that practical joke.

I don't think I kept that accessory because it wasn't stable, but I still have several practical joke .acc files. My favorite is "Gravity", which makes the mouse fall to the bottom of the screen. Unfortunately, it only works well in single-TOS mode."

Mike tells Greg:

"The Milan is just booting from ROM for now, so it's contained there :) One of my favorite TOS ACC's was "Dance".

The ATX to AT power connector arrived today. It has two additional wires with lugs attached exiting the ATX side of the cable, no instructions where they go. Green, Black, black is tied to case ground, not sure about the green one. Hopefully it's some method of getting the ATX supply to turn on. The AT style Milan board does not support the power switch feature. Need to search a bit more for a hack I guess.

Haven't been able to find a PC mouse connector anywhere for the main board, so no mouse yet. Time to get out the soldering iron and stick one on myself.

Funny walking into Comp USA and a few other stores. If it doesn't plug into a USB connector, the kids have no idea what it is I'm talking about. SCSI cards are "special order". . Comp USA had one floppy drive in stock. Asked for EDO memory, you would have thought I wanted a part off the Mercury space capsule. Guess that's what Digikey is for.

I'm sure once I get the 060 installation figured out, the same setup will work on the Afterburner. Now that is going to be cool! Expose, Apex and NOVA - look out!

This is fun!"

Michael Schwingen addresses Mike's question about the RAM amount not adding up, the video and SCSI questions:

"Or the total load is too high - there is a limit to the capacitive load on the DRAM BUS, but is difficult to quantify. Stuffing in 4 SIMMs with 16 chips each might be above the limit, which may lead to memory errors. The safest method is to use 2-3 SIMMs of higher capacity, when using all 4 slots, you get less problems with SIMMs that have fewer chips on them, but that may require some experimentation.

The ATI [video card] is probably better, although I don't have much experience with ATI cards except getting them up in 640x480 monochrome mode (VGA bios emulator and TOS).

My [SCSI] driver only supports Symbios/LSI Logic 53C810 chips - these are available on multiple cards, from the Asus SC200 to no name. I do not know any driver that supports Adaptec cards."

Roger Burrows asks about benchmarking his Hard drive:

"Please, would anyone have any speed benchmarking programs for Atari hard disks?"

Our favorite techie, Alison, tells Roger:

"I'm at the final stages of testing of my new memory card hard disk. It's fast!! At the moment I'm shifting a single sector about in 500uS including command negotiation. It's looking to be about the ST's limit of 1Mbyte/s with almost no latency.

This has been in development for about 18-months information gathering.

Here it is on the analyzer;
http://www.logicsays.com/pub/LAS/PrintCapture0020.gif "

Peter West tells both Roger and Alison:

"There was a very useful utility HOW_FAST by Christian Moeller, published by /ST Computer/ magazine on one of their PD disks, which plots a graph of transfer speeds versus block/file sizes for both read and write operations via the OS (or read-only if you prefer); you can set limits for smallest and largest block size, block growth and number of tests as well as Y-axis markings. You can also save the data as a text file for future reference.

I have translated all the files into English and can send them to you if you like - the originals only amount to some 47 kB (before compression or miming)."

Roger tells Alison:

"Oh for a logic analyzer, drool ... would have been *very* useful when I was reverse engineering the SCSI/Link hardware ...

It looks like you ought to be able to shift 255 sectors at a time, at about 1.5MB/sec ... or have I missed something?"

Alison replies:

"Technically yes, it should be able to block shift 255 sectors. I've noticed certainly with Atari's ACSI drivers that it will only read one sector at a time.

The analyzer has been a godsend, spent months mulling over the market.

This for example is everything involved in booting up a drive, these are 6-byte commands; [whole bunch of hex numbers follow] "

Dr. Uwe Seimet asks Alison:

"Which drivers are you referring to?"

Alison tells Uwe:

"Atari’s. I can only go from what I see in front of me on an analyzer. It’s reading contiguous sectors each with a fresh command."

Uwe replies:

"AHDI reads/writes up to 255 contiguous sectors per command when accessing the ACSI bus.

The code bootstrapping the driver (i.e. SHDRIVER.SYS or any other drive) reads only one sector per command, if I remember correctly, but this code is only used during system initialization. I guess that you were referring to the boot code when talking about reading only one sector at a time?

Just a note: AHDI also does not read/write more than 255 contiguous sectors when accessing the SCSI bus (TT/Falcon), even though a higher sector count is possible here out of the box. Other drivers do not suffer this limitation."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. I hope your Thanksgiving dinner was as successful as mine, and that you in fact have every bit as much to be thankful for as I have.

C’mon back next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Making A Killing On eBay With PS3!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Violent Games Blamed In Germany!
  Zelda Wins Wii Players
  And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

EBayers Making Killing In PlayStation 3 Auctions

Owners of the highly sought after Play Station 3 were reaping hefty profits

from sales of the consoles as soon as eBay lifted restrictions on their sales.

One console that was offered in an auction that was nearing its close on Friday afternoon had bids that reached $2,850. Sony suggests a retail price of $500 for the basic system. The basic package comes with a 20-Gbyte drive. The company suggests an additional $100 for systems with extras like wireless capabilities, Bluetooth high-definition DVD players, and 60-Gbyte drives.

Sony announced that it would be shipping only 400,000 PlayStation 3units as the console made its U.S. debut Friday. That resulted in hot sales, lines that lasted for days, and a few reports of violence.

eBay imposed restrictions before the video game machine went on sale in an attempt to prevent fraud and other complaints like those that followed the launch of Microsoft’s xBox360 last year. The restrictions applied specifically to Sony’s new console and Nintendo Wii pre-sales. Nintendo plans to release the Wii on Sunday.

"These highly-anticipated video game consoles will be in extremely short supply during their initial launch," eBay wrote on its Web site. "During the launch of the similarly-released Microsoft xBox360, we saw a high number of well-intentioned sellers unable to meet their pre-sale obligations to buyers due to restricted supply, as well as an increase in fraudulent listings for these items."

Just before its official release before Thanksgiving last year, the xBox360 was drawing bids around $1,000 on eBay. Microsoft released a limited supply as part of a marketing strategy, which also boasted the release as the biggest game launch ever.

The PlayStation 3 and Wii restrictions on eBay permit the pre-sale listing of only one console for each seller before the products’ launch. They also require sellers to accept payment through PayPal, have at least 50 comments, with 98% or higher positive ratings, in the auction Web site’s feedback listings. That makes the units eligible for coverage under PayPal’s Buyer Protection plan. Pre-sales of the game consoles are not allowed to be marked with "Buy It Now" offers and must be displayed with pictures and pre-order receipts.

eBay’s pre-sale listings of Wii products were around 2,000 at the end of the week. One seller drew six bids, with the highest being $256 and about one day remaining before the listing would close. Another drew an $800 bid. The suggested retail price is $249.99.

Friday afternoon, the xBox360 console received a top bid of $369.99 with 18 minutes remaining. That console’s suggested retail price is about $300.

PlayStation 3 Even Scarcer Than Predicted

Gamers knew getting their hands on a PlayStation 3 was going to be hard last weekend, but they probably had no idea it would be this hard.

Sony had said going into the game console’s launch it would ship 400,000 units to North America. But retail checks by analysts show the actual number of PS3s on store shelves was less than half of that.

American Technology Research's P.J. McNealy, in a note to investors, said there were just 125,000 to 175,000 PS3s in stores for the system's launch.

That's roughly half of his initial expectations. Colin Sebastian of Lazard Capital Markets estimated the number at around 150,000.

While Sony (Charts) is airlifting PlayStation 3 video game systems to the U.S. on a weekly basis, analysts remain unsure how many it will be able to get on shelves before the end of the year. Sebastian believes only 750,000 will be sold in the U.S. this year. McNealy, who had previously forecast a worldwide shipment number of 2 million units, wrote in a note to investors he is now reviewing those estimates.

Sony, for its part, said in a statement it was pleased with the launch and was now "focused on getting as many new PS3s to the North American market as possible for the holidays." The company added "a new shipment has already arrived and will be available at retail by Black Friday."

Sony's shipping woes are good news for Nintendo. There were between 425,000 and 475,000 Wiis available at launch, wrote McNealy - and Sebastian believes Nintendo will ship 150,000 to 200,000 Wii units per week to North America between now and the end of the year.

Don't misunderstand, it'll still be hard to find one - but a lot easier than it is to find a PS3.

Microsoft (Charts), meanwhile, continues to enjoy its one year headstart over its competitors. Xbox 360s are plentiful in stores and the release of "Gears of War" (the system's flagship game this year) has driven consumers to search for them.

The real winners, though, are the video game profiteers who are hawking their systems on eBay. Sebastian estimates roughly 20,000 PS3s have been sold since pre-orders for the system began last month. The average purchase price so far, he wrote, is approximately $1,500.

If it's any consolation, current prices seem to be falling a bit. A spot check of auctions shows most ending in the $800 (for a 20 GB PS3) to $1,100 (for the 60 GB model) range. Auctions bundling the system with one or two games tend to do better.

The buying frenzy is playing right into scammer hands, though.

One auction, which closed Monday, resulted in a buyer paying $1,100 for "contact information for my friend who acquired a PS3". The price did not include a PS3. And before you argue this was just an example of someone running up the price, it's worth noting that both buyer and seller have feedback scores of over 200 and 100 respectively.

Even Nintendo hasn't been immune from the auction mania. Wii units are only selling at a slight premium, due to their wider availability. (The average price is hovering in the $350 range - a $100 bump over retail prices.) But component cables, which boost the visual quality of the Wii, are sold out in stores. That's feeding the fire on eBay.

The cables, which retail for just $30, are selling for as much as $162 on eBay. And since they're not expected to be back in stock until mid-December, those prices could go even higher.

Zelda Wins Wii Players But Critics Query Future Demand

The rush to get hold of Nintendo’s new Wii video game console is being fueled by demand for another attraction - the new game in Nintendo’s legend of Zelda series - but game critics were uncertain this level of interest would continue.

Nintendo turned to one of its most popular franchises to make sure its Wii console got off on a good start in the three-way race for sales this holiday, against Microsoft’s Xbox360 and Sony Corp.’s Playstation 3.

For almost 20 years the Legend of Zelda has been one of the top properties in the video game industry, selling more than 47 million copies, so Nintendo ensured "The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess" came in tandem with the launch of Wii.

The new game makes use of the new controls of Wii such as its motion-sensitive controller, with players swinging the remote to make sword attacks, pointing it to fire arrows, and even simulating reeling motions in fishing challenges.

"Nintendo has an opportunity to reclaim the market share lead (with the Wii)," said Jamil Moledina, executive director of the Game Developers Conference. Nintendo has some ground to make up. Its GameCube held just 14 percent of the global video game market compared to Sony’s Playstation 2 winning a 70 percent share and Microsoft Xbox’s 16 percent, according to DFC Intelligence.

The new Zelda game has received rave reviews since its release with some critics calling it one of the best Zelda titles yet. According to Gamerankings.com, the title has an average rating of 97 percent among critics.

"It took Nintendo almost a decade to do it, but the publisher has finally created a new Zelda game that is so epic that it deserves to be crowned the best in its class," raved game critic Matt Casamassina on IGN.com.

However the long-anticipated release of the Zelda title was expected to create a buzz but Nintendo has said that only about two of the 30 new Wii games by year-end are Nintendo titles.

Critics said they would look more at the pick-up of other games to realistically gauge future third party support to Nintendo which has been lacking in the past.

A new release "Red Steel" is an original created by developer UbiSoft for the Wii that puts gamers in a modern conflict with Japanese gangsters, firing with a variety of guns and swing the remote during in-game swordfights.

"Red Steel," however, has received mixed reviews from game critics, who have criticized its sluggish controls. It received a 5 out of 10 on 1Up.com, which called the game a "ho-hum shooter with a creative but flawed gimmick stapled on."

"Having the support of third party publishers is a bigger issue than having a hit game (like Zelda) at launch, because Nintendo already had

an amazing reputation for first party titles," said Moledina.

Violent Games Blamed For German School Attack

Leading German lawmakers demanded a crackdown on violent computer and simulated war games on Tuesday over concerns that they may have helped inspire a young man to attack his former school with guns and explosives.

The masked 18-year-old man stormed the Scholl secondary school on Monday in the western German town of Emsdetten, wounding as many as 27 people before committing suicide.

The young man, identified only as Bastian B., was known to authorities and due in court on Tuesday for weapons violations, local police said. According to German media reports, he had a fondness for war simulation and computer games. Wolfgang Bosbach, the deputy head of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) in parliament, said it was time to consider banning games that simulate wanton killing.

"We need effective guidelines to protect children from exposure to different types of media, but we don’t need (simulated) killer games that can lead to brutalisation," Bosbach was quoted on the Netzeitung news Web site as saying. Bosbach added that scientific studies have shown violent games have disturbing effects on some children.

Christa Stewens, family minister for the conservative-led state of Bavaria, called for a nationwide ban on war games like paintball and laser tag, in which players hunt down and pretend to kill each other with guns firing paint balls or laser beams.

"The federal government must finally ban (simulated) killer games... Bavaria has had such a ban in place since 2002," Stewens said in a statement. She added that children should also be prevented from playing violent computer games.

The federal government has so far refused to ban such games.

The opposition Greens warned against banning violent computer and war games. Volker Beck, a leading Greens member of parliament, said it would be better to focus the debate on the proper use of computers and not jump to conclusions before it was clear what motivated Bastian B.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Judge To Rule On Landmark Internet Porn Law

A U.S. law designed to prevent children from viewing pornography online would undermine the free speech of millions of adult Internet users, opponents of the measure said on Monday.

The law is so imprecisely written it would restrict most adult Internet users to material that is only suitable for children, lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union and other plaintiffs said in closing arguments of a four-week trial.

The ACLU and others sued the U.S. government, claiming the Child Online Protection Act of 1998 violates the Constitution, and they argued on Monday that filtering was a more effective tool that does not curtail free speech.

But attorneys for the U.S. government called the law necessary to protect young people from sexually explicit material and said Internet filtering technology was not good enough to block offending Web sites from personal computers.

"Evidence shows that many parents do not actively use the filters," said Joel McElvain, an attorney for the U.S. Justice Department.

Judge Lowell Reed of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania is expected to rule in spring 2007, and lawyers said the ruling was likely to be appealed because the case is seen as an important test of free speech limits on the Internet.

Among those suing are Nerve.com, an online magazine about sexual literature, art and politics that claims 1 million readers a month, and Urban Dictionary, an online dictionary of contemporary slang with 40 million readers.

The law, known as COPA, could force them to stop publishing, ACLU attorney Chris Hansen said.

"That’s an awful lot of speech that would be chilled by COPA going into effect," Hansen said.

The law has never been implemented because it was challenged in court immediately after its signing by former President Bill Clinton.

It was held to be unconstitutional by federal district and appeals courts. The U.S. Supreme Court allowed an injunction against enforcement to stand, and referred the case back to the Pennsylvania court for a full trial.

The law would impose a maximum fine of $50,000 a day and up to six months in prison for anyone who uses the Internet to "make any communication for commercial purposes that is available to any minor and that includes any material that is harmful to minors."

Microsoft Files New Antitrust Documents With EU

Microsoft Corp. filed revised documents with the European Commission on Thursday aimed at complying with a landmark antitrust decision from 2004, the European Commission said.

Microsoft met a deadline set by Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes, but

it will be months before it is clear whether the submission is sufficient to avoid a fine that could be as high as 3 million euros ($3.9 million) a day.

The Commission ruled in 2004 that Microsoft had abused its dominant position in the market because Windows, used on more than 95 percent of the world's personal computers, allowed too little interoperability for other software makers.

The Commission's decision, it recalled, required Microsoft to "disclose and license complete and accurate interface documentation which would allow non-Microsoft work group servers to achieve full interoperability with Windows PCs and servers."

"Microsoft has submitted a revised version of the Technical Documentation," the Commission said in a statement.

Asked how long the Commission would take to see whether Microsoft had complied, spokesman Jonathan Todd told a daily briefing: "It's very difficult to put a precise timing on it but I think we're talking months rather than weeks."

The Commission set a deadline of July but delayed it until a court proceeding finished in December, 2004. In July, 2006, the Commission fined Microsoft 280.5 million euros for dragging its feet, on top of a fine of almost 500 million euros in 2004 for its initial violation.

In a statement calling the submission of documents a "milestone," Microsoft said it had completed the review and editing of some 100 documents, which number 8,500 pages.

"We will continue to work closely with the Commission and the (independent) Trustee to ensure that we are in full compliance with every aspect of the Commission's decision," the company said in the statement.

Microsoft says its actions have been lawful and flatly denied the findings of the European Union. It has appealed the decision to Europe's second highest court, the EU's Court of First Instance.

At issue is the low-end market for servers that need to hook up to Windows to manage printers and files.

Novell Netware once led the market but the Commission said Microsoft dealt it a body blow by illegally withholding information it needed to interoperate with Windows.

During that time Microsoft's market share climbed from about one in three to a dominant four out of five low-end servers.

But some businesses can still make use of the documentation.

The Commission said it will allow those businesses to review Microsoft's latest effort "to evaluate whether it contains the necessary information to allow the development of interoperable work group server operating system products."

At the same time, a Monitoring Trustee appointed by the Commission will test the documentation.

If the Commission decides that the documentation is acceptable it will

face the question of whether the price Microsoft plans to charge for the protocols is justified.

Microsoft could face further fines if the Commission finds that the price was based on Microsoft’s exercise of monopoly power, rather than on the originality of its product.

Another provision of the decision required the software maker to make available a version of Windows without streaming audio-visual software, which Microsoft has done. Customers have shown no interest in that product, however.

Software makers, analysts and investors have keenly watched the long-running battle for its implications for the new Windows operating system Vista, which is due to hit shops in January.

Vista has caused concern for the Commission, prompting Microsoft to make some changes and give data to security software makers for interoperability.

The Commission is focused in particular on the fixed document format offered by Adobe, and anti-malicious software programmes offered by such companies as McAfee and Symantec.

Nigerian Scams Cost Britons Millions

Internet scams, credit card fraud and money laundering operations originating in Nigeria cost Britons millions of pounds a year, a report on Monday said.

The problem has become so prevalent that Nigerians in Britain are in danger of being widely seen as corrupt, the study from the Chatham House think-tank added.

But neither Britain nor Nigeria are taking the problem seriously, it said. "Private-sector fraudsters and corrupt public officials and British companies have profited from the general Western focus on terrorist financing, drugs and people trafficking," it said.

Britons now closely associate the African country with the so-called "advance fee" scam whereby people are contacted by e-mail and offered the opportunity to earn millions of dollars.

The recipient is told they will earn a commission in exchange for aiding the sender in transferring funds.

The victim has to send bank details or even cash, ostensibly to help pay off corrupt officials, and then the victim’s bank account is stripped.

"The frauds are often mischievously inventive and run on an industrial scale," the report said.

Among the variations, victims have been offered the chance to benefit from a share of Saddam Hussein’s family savings and even money "looted" from the rubble of the World Trade Center after the September 11 attacks.

According to the Chatham House report, an analysis by Dutch-based consultancy Ultrascan concluded the total losses from advance fee fraud scams to British companies and individuals in 2005 was $520 million (275 million pounds).

Only the United States was worse off, losing $720 million that year. Nigeria was not the only source of such scams.

Although the scam has been widely publicized, people still fall for it through a mixture of greed, naivete and a sense of racial superiority, the British study said.

"The fraudsters play on the enduring myth of African infantilism and simple-mindedness: a European who believes in this might find it unremarkable that a Nigerian holding tens of millions of dollars would be clueless about what to do with it. In such circumstances, what could be more natural than to turn to the clever white person for help?"

Nigeria is also becoming a center for "phishing" attacks in which people receive e-mails, purportedly from their banks, asking for account details and PINs.

Other Nigerian-origin crimes include forged checks and postal orders, with 20 million pounds ($38 million) worth of such items found in one day at Heathrow Airport during a spot check.

Corrupt Nigerian officials have also traditionally used London to launder embezzled money, the study says, noting about $1.3 billion looted by the late Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha was processed via British financial institutions.

Britain and Nigeria must work closer together if there is to be any chance of tackling the problem, the report concluded.

Microsoft Sues Phishers

Microsoft has initiated 97 lawsuits throughout Europe and the Middle East during an eight-month investigation into fraudulent Web pages, with another 32 criminal complaints filed in cooperation with local authorities, the company said Wednesday.

All of the cases are against individuals who attempted to capture the log-in and password details of users by building fraudulent Hotmail and MSN.com sign-in pages, said Jean-Christophe Le Toquin, a Microsoft attorney. A total of 253 sites were investigated, he said.

Microsoft’s Global Phishing Enforcement program, which started last March, aims to curtail fake Web sites built by criminals trying to obtain financial information or passwords by tricking users, called "phishing." The company uses its technology to crawl the Internet to find Web pages that look suspicious, Le Toquin said.

Once investigators identify a phishing site, Microsoft either files a criminal complaint or forwards the information to prosecutors, depending on the country’s legal requirements, Le Toquin said.

By country, Turkey led the pack with 50 criminal complaints, followed by

28 in Germany and 11 in France. Legal actions were also filed in the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Morocco, the Netherlands, and the U.K.

Microsoft has settled with four phishers, all 16- to 20-year-old males, in France and Norway, Le Toquin said. Each of those pursued in France paid Microsoft $2564, a fine the company considered in proportion to their actions, he said.

Many of the fake sites were created by the phishers to trick their peers into divulging their log-in credentials, Le Toquin said. The phishers would try to lure their friends to the fake pages through links sent by instant messaging programs, he said.

The purpose was to "take control of the account of the victim," Le Toquin said. Microsoft said it will continue its investigation, particularly focusing on phishing sites connected with more sophisticated hacking, Le Toquin said. The company has also been investigating and taking legal action against pirated software.

Microsoft to Face Challenge Over Linux Licenses

Supporters of PC operating system Linux are preparing to counter a recent deal penned by Microsoft Corp which establishes for the first time the principle of paying the software giant for the operating system, whose license requires it to be free.

Microsoft signed a deal with Novell, one of the providers of Linux, in which Novell paid it a lump sum in return for a guarantee that Microsoft would not sue Novell’s clients for what it calls a violation of its own patents in the Linux program.

The prospect of a drawn-out legal battle with Microsoft, an experienced litigator, could push users of Linux into the hands of Novell and away from dominant Linux provider, Red Hat, which does not have such a deal with Microsoft.

Although Linux is free, providers of the system offer the software with packaging, documentation and - most important - installation and maintenance, so any client shift from Red Hat would cost it money.

"Either customers desert Red Hat to go to Novell, to get safety, or Red Hat will be forced into a similar deal with Microsoft," said Eban Moglen, a professor at Columbia Law School and founding director of the Software Freedom Law Center in New York.

Moglen, one of the pioneers of free software, said Microsoft’s deal skirts the requirements of the GNU General Public License, used by Linux and other free programs, which requires the software to be given away.

He and others have started work on updating the license to close the loophole by saying a promise not to sue, such as the one given by Microsoft, would be automatically applicable to everyone.

That would effectively flip Microsoft’s agreement on its head and guarantee that no one would face a suit from Microsoft if anyone were protected.

"A clause like that would not be difficult to get community agreement on

these days," Moglen said, adding that a change could be ready in weeks or months. Under the Novell deal, in which both companies agreed not sue each other's clients for patent violation, Microsoft agreed to pay Novell $348 million, while Novell pays Microsoft $40 million, on the basis that Novell has fewer customers.

Microsoft says it has patent rights to some of the technology in Linux, although it has never said exactly what those rights might be or what patents are involved.

Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer said if customers bought Linux from anyone but Novell, they could face trouble.

"If a customer says, 'Look, do we have liability for the use of your patented work?' Essentially, if you're using non-SUSE Linux, then I'd say the answer is yes," Ballmer told eWeek.com recently, referring to the Linux system sold by Novell.

"I suspect that (customers) will take that issue up with their distributor," Ballmer said, adding that if customers considered doing a direct download of a non-SUSE Linux version, "they'll think twice about that".

Microsoft makes the Windows operating system, for which it charges billions of dollars a year, but Linux has been a thorn in the software giant's side because it is freely available.

Linux was created, maintained and improved by volunteers working under a license requiring that it be freely available for copying, modification and improvements.

California Court Expands Immunity For Bloggers

Individuals who use the Internet to distribute information from another source may not be held to account if the material is considered defamatory, the California Supreme Court ruled on Monday in a reversal of a lower court decision.

The ruling supports federal law that clears individuals of liability if they transmit, but are not the source of, defamatory information. It expands protections the law gives to Internet service providers to include bloggers and activist Web sites.

"We acknowledge that recognizing broad immunity for defamatory republication on the Internet has some troubling consequences," California's high court justices said in their opinion.

"Until Congress chooses to revise the settled law in this area, however, plaintiffs who contend they were defamed in an Internet posting may only seek recovery from the original source of the statement," the decision stated. The opinion, written by Associate Justice Carol Corrigan, addressed a lawsuit by two doctors who claimed defendant Ilena Rosenthal and others distributed e-mails and Internet postings that republished statements the doctors said impugned their character and competence.

Rosenthal operates a San Diego-based Web site known as the Humantics Foundation (http://www.humanticsfoundation.com), which is critical of

silicone breast implants.

Rosenthal had countered that her statements were protected speech and immune under the Communications Decency Act of 1996. It holds that: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." A California appeals court had ruled that Internet service providers and users could be held liable if they republish a statement if it is known to be defamatory.

California's high court took that decision up for review because the lawsuit against Rosenthal involved an individual instead of a service provider, and opted for a broad view of immunity under the Communications Decency Act. "Requiring providers, users, and courts to account for the nuances of common law defamation, and all the various ways they might play out in the Internet environment, is a Herculean assignment that we are reluctant to impose," the court's justices held in their opinion.

"By declaring that no 'user' may be treated as a 'publisher' of third party content, Congress has comprehensively immunized republication by individual Internet users," they added.

Mark Goldowitz, the defense counsel who represented Rosenthal, said in a statement that the ruling offers protection against those who would chill free speech on the Internet.

"The soapbox is not liable for what the speaker has said," said Kurt Opsahl, a staff attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation who filed a brief arguing free speech protections should cover individuals, not just Internet service providers.

Free Software Bypasses Attachment Limits

There's a new way to send large movie, music and other files without worrying about whether the e-mail systems can handle large attachments.

Free software from Pando Networks Inc. automatically converts your attachments into a small file that your friend or relative can simply open to download the original file from Pando or elsewhere. Beginning Tuesday, Pando is offering plug-ins to work with most Web-based mail services.

Major e-mail providers generally limit the size of files you can send or receive to 10 megabytes. That's fine for text and even small photos, but try sending an entire photo album, music or video, and you run against the caps quickly. And even if your provider lets you send the large files, the recipient's service provider might not accept them.

"Everybody has experienced problems of, 'I want to send something but it's too large to send by e-mail,'" said Robert Levitan, Pando's chief executive.

With Pando, files larger than a specified size are automatically converted. A copy of the file is sent to Pando's servers, and only a small attachment gets sent to the recipient, who must have or obtain the free software from Pando.

Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system and Internet Explorer browser

are required to send files using the Web-based plug-ins, but Mac users can get the free standalone application to open them, as well as to send their own. Windows users can also send files with the standalone program or a plug-in for Microsoft’s Outlook e-mail software.

Pando accepts files of up to 1 gigabyte, 10 times the free offering from YouSendIt.com, which isn’t integrated with the Web-based mail services. Pando plans to make money from ads and a premium version with higher limits and longer retention, files are deleted from Pando’s servers after 14 days under the free plan.

Microsoft Says Office Unfazed By Google Threat

One of the two new heads of Microsoft Corp.’s Office software team downplayed the threat from Google Inc.’s Web-based word processing and spreadsheet applications, saying they are unlikely to appeal to corporate customers.

Antoine Leblond, who became co-leader of the Office group in June, said Google was the latest in a long line of challengers to the Office software suite, which includes Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, Outlook e-mail and PowerPoint presentations.

"The simple argument that ’this is good enough for 90 percent of what we do’ has fallen on its face over and over and over again," Leblond told Reuters in an interview on Tuesday. "When it comes to mission critical things and key pieces of how people run their businesses, the threshold is higher."

Leblond and Kurt DelBene took over the Office group after Steven Sinofsky left to head up the Windows team. Leblond oversees what he calls "old school" applications like Word, Excel and PowerPoint, while DelBene oversees the new SharePoint Web collaboration software and other server-based programs.

Microsoft will release the long-awaited Office upgrade to business customers next week along with its new Windows Vista operating system, which has been more than five years in the making. These products are the core of a broad product upgrade cycle aimed at restoring the software giant’s growth.

Microsoft believes new Web services will work in tandem with PC-installed software, a vision that differs from that of "software as a service" advocates, such as Salesforce.com (NYSE:CRM - news) and Google, who expect services delivered over the Web to eventually replace software that resides on local PCs.

It’s a bet with big stakes, considering Office accounts for nearly a third of Microsoft’s total revenue and half its profits, and particularly since the company has been unable to replicate its desktop success on the Internet.

Already the clear leader in Web search, Google has in recent months pushed out new applications to rival individual Office programs, including e-mail for organizations, employee Web pages, scheduling, spreadsheets and word processing.

Google Chief Executive Eric Schmidt has dismissed the notion that it is competing with Office, saying his company is focused on simple applications with an emphasis on sharing that are aimed at consumers and small business users.

"Free software has an appealing ring to it, but free software has been around for a while now and it turns out free doesn't trump the software doing what people need it to do," said Leblond, a 17-year veteran of the Office team.

Microsoft's new Office Live is an example of its "software plus services" approach. It lets small businesses set up Web sites, company-branded e-mail and Web applications to allow project management and collaboration. It works with Office but the programs are largely different from those familiar to desktop PC users.

The latest upgrade, Office 2007, will be available to consumers in January, but Leblond said don't necessarily expect a huge spike in demand, as adoption patterns have changed.

"We went from the world of 15 years ago where we would release the software and people would be sleeping outside the stores to go buy the boxes the next day to a much more regular rhythm," said Leblond, adding that customers now base purchases more on multi-year technology cycles.

Internet Makes Its Move to Number Two

The evolution of the Internet from a niche novelty to a primary source for gathering information continues to take shape with more Americans now using the Web to find news and information about science than any other medium except one, according to a new study.

The World Wide Web ranks second only to television as the primary destination for Americans seeking information and news about science, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

And for those who have made the jump to high-speed cable Internet connections, the Internet is just as popular as television.

"People's use of the Internet for science information has a lot to do with the Internet's convenience as a research tool, but it is also connected to people's growing dependence on the Internet for information of all types," said John B. Horrigan, the study's principal author and associate director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

The study showed that 20 percent of Americans, or some 40 million people, obtain most of their science information from the Internet, compared with 41 percent citing television. Newspapers and magazines were each credited with 14 percent and radio with 4 percent.

While the Internet ranked second behind television for science news, it lagged behind local and national television, radio, and the local paper as a source for general news. It beat out only national newspapers.

However, Horrigan said the trend could accelerate rapidly in the coming years as the number of young adults with high-speed Internet connections

at home continues to grow. According to the study, more American’s aged 15 to 25 already use the Internet for science news and information by a 44 percent to 32 percent margin over television.

"Many think of the Internet as a gigantic encyclopedia on all subjects, and this certainly applies to scientific information," Horrigan said.

Many analysts predict that the days of television’s dominance as the information medium of choice throughout the world is slowly grinding to an end. With more and more reliable Web sites popping up on the Internet by the hour, it becomes more likely that users will turn off the TV and turn on the PC to get their information.

Horrigan said the fact that the Internet allows users to seek out information within their own schedule makes the medium a more attractive source for gathering information. Still users are careful when seeking out news or information on the Internet. About 80 percent of those who get science information online try to check its accuracy elsewhere - another online source, offline resources, or the original study.

Only 13 percent said they turn to the Internet primarily for its accuracy. Most do so because they consider it convenient.

Some 87 percent of Internet users have looked up science information online at one point or another, and two-thirds say they have stumbled upon science news when they logged on for another reason.

As Online Shopping Grows, So Do Dangers

As growing numbers of Americans turn to the Internet for holiday shopping, experts warn that online dangers such as fraud and identity theft are increasing as well.

One out of 10 people shopping online could become a victim of online fraud this holiday season, according to a report by the National Consumers League and National Cyber Security Alliance.

Still, the ease of online shopping and growing popularity of the Internet is becoming irresistible for time-strapped consumers.

A survey of some 9,000 US adults by Zogby International found two-thirds were planning to make at least one online purchase for the holiday season.

"Instead of fighting for a parking space and waiting in long lines, many shoppers have turned to the Internet to help with at least some of their holiday shopping," the research firm said.

Research firm comScore Networks predicts online retail consumer spending for the 2006 holiday season excluding travel will be above 24 billion dollars, a 24 percent rise from last year.

With the kickoff of the Christmas shopping season on Friday - the day after the Thanksgiving Day holiday - analysts see a greater share of sales going online. While traditional stores call the opening day "Black Friday," e-commerce sites were gearing for "Cyber Monday," with many people shopping from computers at their offices.

A survey for the online retail association Shop.org found the number of people who will shop online for holiday gifts from work is expected to surge to 61 million people this year, up from 51.7 million people last year.

ComScore expects 600 million dollars in sales on Cyber Monday, which would be the biggest online shopping day on record.

But cyber-crooks are honing their tactics and stepping up their efforts as this trend increases, analysts say.

A report by the research firm Gartner Inc. found the number of so-called "phishing" e-mails - designed to trick recipients into revealing personal or financial information - has doubled in the past two years and that losses topped 2.8 billion dollars.

Gartner estimated that 24.4 million Americans have clicked on a phishing e-mail in 2006, up from 11.9 million in 2005, while 3.5 million have given sensitive information to the phishers, up from 1.9 million.

The average loss per victim has grown from 257 dollars two years ago to 1,244 per victim in 2006.

"The good news is that, this year, fewer people think they lost money to phishers, but when they did lose, they lost more," said Avivah Litan, a Gartner analyst.

"The average loss per victim nearly quintupled between 2005 and 2006, and the thieves seem to be targeting higher-income earners who are also more likely to transact on the Internet."

Experts warn that other online dangers have not disappeared either, such as spyware, hacking and e-mail fraud schemes, despite improvements in software and more consumer awareness.

The SANS Institute, a high-tech training center, said recently there is "an explosion in cyber crime, driven in part by a surge in the number of online criminals in Asian countries along with continuing growth in attacks from Eastern European countries."

"The surge is so great that several banks have reported 400 to 500 percent increases in losses to cyber fraud from 2005 to 2006," the institute said.

Security experts say consumers can minimize the risks by following a few common-sense guidelines: use firewalls and security software; use reputable merchants; and avoid using an unencrypted or open wireless network. Caution is also advised about giving away financial information.

"Knowing who you’re dealing with and providing your financial information securely are very important when you’re shopping online," said Susan Grant, Director of the National Consumers League fraud information center.

Net Watchdog: Tips for Safer Online Shopping

The holidays are almost upon us, and online shopping is about to go into overdrive. An estimated 114 million consumers will turn to the Internet for at least part of their holiday shopping this year, according to Jupiter

Research. With the rush comes increased risk of identity theft, credit card fraud, and other types of online consumer scams, experts warn.

Already, scams involving the hard-to-find TMX Elmo toy are circulating around the Internet. At several online forums, shoppers are complaining about eBay sellers taking money for the popular toy, and then vanishing before delivering the goods. Similarly, Sony Computer Entertainment America is warning online shoppers not to purchase preorder discount offers for the gaming console PlayStation 3 from certain Web sites that are misleading consumers.

"People spend more time and money online this time of year," says David Perry, director of global education for Trend Micro. Scammers, he says, know this all too well and fine-tune their scams to catch holiday shoppers off guard. Perry says people let their defenses down during the rush to buy gifts. He cautions against having too much holiday "good will" when shopping online, and notes that there tends to be an uptick in scams, spam, and malware attacks during the holiday season. MX Logic reports that during the months of September through November e-mail recipients clicked on an average of 12 to 26 phishing messages a week, compared to an average of 7 per week during the rest of the year. MX Logic attributes increased clicks to an onslaught of holiday-related spam containing phishing lures.

Consumer groups such as the Better Business Bureau and Consumer Affairs are also warning shoppers to take extra care.

Tips for Safe Online Holiday Shopping:

Update your Web browsing software.

The latest versions of Internet Explorer and Firefox have been updated to include beefed-up security. Both include antiphishing features to protect against fake sites that attempt to trick users into divulging their log-ins or financial information.

Firefox’s default protection stops at comparing sites against a known blacklist of phishing sites. IE 7 includes site analysis that will try to warn you about a suspicious site even if it’s not yet on a blacklist.

Scrutinize that e-mail message that purports to be from your favorite retailer. Volumes of spam spike considerably over the holidays, and with that increase come higher volumes of phishing e-mail, says Mary McEvoy, spokesperson for the Internet security firm SonicWall. Last year between Thanksgiving and Christmas, 750 million phishing e-mails were sent worldwide, SonicWall reported.

MX Logic says the volume of spam from legitimate online retailers jumps 20 percent between Thanksgiving and Christmas. And what about ill-intentioned spam?

MX Logic says the difference between this year and last is that a greater percentage of spam this year is malicious, rather than simply being a nuisance. Experts advise keeping your guard up even when you receive e-mails from familiar firms like Amazon.com and Lands’ End. Cybercrooks are getting more cunning at making their messages look legit: That e-mail from Amazon asking you to update your billing information or confirm your order could be a fake.

Shop in the right frame of mind.

Don’t shop when you’re tired, under pressure, or distracted, the Better Business Bureau advises. You need to be fully "cyber-aware," it says. A clear head prevents you from getting hoodwinked into buying something online that seems to be too good a deal to pass up.

Do your homework on the vendor you’re about to do business with. The BBB lets you run a background check on thousands of Web merchants at its site. You should do a Google search of the online store you’re considering patronizing, to see what the Web community is saying about it. If the search results spit back vitriol, that should serve as a red flag to pass on that merchant.

Background checks are also advisable for online stores that you find using comparison shopping engines. Even if such a shopping engine gives a merchant a positive rating, you should do your own research and not rely just on ratings found on one site.

Pay attention to details.

Check your browser’s address window to see whether a Web site’s "product checkout" page begins with ’https’ instead of ’http.’ Also check whether the checkout page displays a padlock icon in the lower right-hand border of the browser window. Both of these things indicate that the site is using secure encryption to protect your credit card information.

If an online retailer displays a seal from Truste or the Better Business Bureau, that’s a good sign that the merchant in question is reliable. But be sure to click on the logo or seal to make sure it actually links to the BBB or Truste site, to validate that the seal is authentic. It the logo doesn’t link back to the appropriate site, look the merchant up yourself on the BBB or Truste site. Make a paper trail - and check it twice.

Make sure to print copies of all online receipts so that you can check them against your credit card statement. You should also print copies of all guarantees and warranties.

Pay with your credit card whenever possible. Most credit card companies won’t hold you liable for fraudulent purchases.

Beware of charity fraud.

This is the time of year when charity fraud becomes popular with scammers. Charity scams spring up after disasters, but they also assume a larger presence during the holiday season. Be careful of charity frauds that use names that sound similar to legitimate organizations and may be using the logos of legitimate charities.

Check out any charity by going to Wise Giving.

New Web Site Dedicated To Regifting

More people say they’re regifting, giving a gift they received from someone to another person. Is that financially savvy, or is it tacky?

That’s the debate under way at http://www.regiftable.com, a new Web site created by Money Management International, a nonprofit organization based in Houston that does consumer education and financial counseling.

MMI created the site because "whether or not you're a fan or a foe, regifting has become a phenomenon," said MMI spokeswoman Kim McGrigg. And it does constitute a spending alternative as the holiday season approaches.

McGrigg noted that a survey done by MMC last year found that some 40 percent of respondents admitted that they had regifted. The main reasons were to save money, to save time or because they felt the recipient would like the item. Some people writing the Web site share those attitudes. Others do not.

One woman wrote, for example, that her sister "thinks by putting a big bow on her regifts, no one will know they have been regifted." It seems the tactic didn't work last year because the woman last Christmas got back the gift she had given her sister a year earlier.

"I am thinking of wrapping it up again and giving it back to her this Christmas," the woman wrote.

McGrigg, who admits to being a regifter herself, said it needs to be done tactfully. Her tips for doing it right:

* Always rewrap the gift and, of course, change the gift tag
* Only give items that are new and in their original packaging
* Never regift one-of-a-kind or handmade items
* Know who gave you the item so you don't regift it to the original giver

MMI had planned to maintain the site just during the holiday season, but will keep it in place longer, McGrigg said.

"We've noticed regifting is also done for weddings," she said. "So there might be some reason for this to extend beyond the holidays."

Does Second Life Have Nine Lives?

Second Life nearly lost its life this weekend. The popular online world, in which users portray themselves as on-screen characters called avatars and buy and sell fake land and buildings for real money, was struck by a worm called "grey goo." The evil goo surrounded on-screen objects with spinning gold rings.

When users tried to play with the rings, the added load on Second Life's servers caused the game to grind to a halt. A wave of user complaints forced the game's owner, Linden Lab of San Francisco, to shut it down for a good scrubbing over the weekend.

Second Life is an artifact of the digital age. Its makers call it "shared 3D entertainment," an online world that was founded in 1999 with nothing inside it except for a few rules of play. Gamers, who can join Second Life for free, were then left to populate it, designing their avatars and adding their own buildings, or buying them from others.

What Second Life's users build, buy, or sell remains in the system, so it grows over time in the same way a city in the real world does. But this world is growing fast: According to Linden Lab, which runs the system from a San Francisco data center, Second Life is mushrooming at a monthly rate

of nearly 40%.

And its users are spending money - real money. Hundreds of thousands of dollars can change hands in one day in Second Life, with users forking over credit cards and using PayPal accounts for everything from new digital clothes for their avatars to facetime with real-world business consultants who can help them tweak their storefronts within the 3D system.

If this sounds a bit like the Matrix - the mega-grossing movie in which Keanu Reeves plays Neo, a programmer-savior bent on destroying a computer-based world that enslaved the human race - that’s because it is.

Of course, there’s one exception: Second Lifers are willing participants. Not only do they give their time gladly to the system, but quite a few make money at it, too. For instance, users can pool their online cash to build 3D amusement parks, then charge other users admission to enter them. Even companies from Adidas to Reuters have lined up to figure out new ways to sell their wares in Second Life’s pixel-based world.

And that means that Second Life, despite this weekend’s meltdown, might have nine lives after all.

Fed Up With Telemarketers? Try Mooing

Congratulations! You can win the holiday of your dreams - a break from telemarketers - if you’re willing to moo, fake a murder scene, or follow a list of other diversonary tactics.

Those calls that always come when you’re sitting down to dinner, with a robotic script to give you the secret of solar-powered hot-water bottles, can be a thing of the past with the Web offers many escapes from what Time Magazine has dubbed one of the worst inventions of the last century.

Some are practical - others frivolous, but tempting.

The Web site www.junkbusters.com encourages people to "bust the junk messages out of your life" by registering their phone number with a national do-not-call registry - or downloading an "out of service tone" to confuse telemarketers’ computers.

"We believe that ’the right to be let alone’ ought to be a fundamental human right, and that nobody should ever have to pay to maintain it," says junkbusters, declaring its mission "to free the world from junk communications."

Including detailed guides and links to other resources to help cut down spam email, junk mail and junk faxes, junkbusters is a toolkit - for people with the time to mine it.

But for more instant relief, http://www.sorrygottago.com hosts a battery of pre-recorded audio clips, some to play down the phone to cold callers, others just for fun.

Many offer the satisfaction of giving corporate callers a taste of their own call-centre manners.

"Your call is very important to us," says one. "That’s why we have you on

'hold' with almost no chance of someone coming over to take the call. But if you would like to hold for an indefinite period of time and have nothing better to do, be our guest. Thank you for calling."

Other clips offer softer exits - cows mooing, or lots of sneezing. A male voice making "I'm listening" noises including a random "Oh I'm here, I'm here," and a "That's unbelievable, you are just unbelievable," before hanging up.

But http://howtoprankatelemarketer.ytmnd.com scales surreal heights.

A comedy clip from American Tom Mabe, "the comedian nationally recognized for getting revenge on those annoying Telemarketers" according to his website, was recently one of the most popular on the user-generated content site.

Mabe turns the tables on the caller who is offering "a complete digital satellite system for free" by saying he is a detective and the caller is trying to contact a man who has just been murdered. Where was the telemarketer last night?

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